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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Task Force Recommends Steps to Address Emergency Department Crowding

BALTIMORE, MD (June 12, 2006) – A task force comprised of expert representatives from city hospitals has released a series of recommendations to address emergency department crowding in Baltimore.

Baltimore Fire Chief William Goodwin and Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein convened the Baltimore City Task Force on Emergency Department Crowding in May 2006 to address a growing problem in the city. At the request of the city officials, the chief executives of area hospitals sent experts to join the advisory group.

Participating hospitals included Bon Secours Hospital, Good Samaritan Hospital, Harbor Hospital, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Johns Hopkins Bayview Hospital, Maryland General Hospital, Mercy Hospital, Sinai Hospital, St. Agnes Hospital, Union Memorial Hospital, and the University of Maryland Medical Center.

In the report, the Task Force recommends enhancing the efficiency of emergency department and hospital care; improving primary care access; offering incentives to nurses; and investing in housing individuals who are chronically homeless.

The Task Force also recommends that Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, Inc. and Baltimore Mental Health System, Inc. consider establishing a diversion center for patients presenting with mental health and substance abuse problems modeled on programs in Orlando and Denver.

“The cooperation among hospitals and between hospitals and the city on the issue of emergency department crowding has been extraordinary,” said Dr. Sharfstein. “Our mutual resolve to address this problem will be the key to moving forward.”

Several recommendations of the Task Force have already been accepted by the Maryland Institute of Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMMS), the state agency that oversees EMS programs in the state. These recommendations include creating (1) a “reverse alert” system notifying hospitals when EMS resources are being stretched thin; and (2) a program to direct ambulances to nearby hospitals that are not crowded, instead of to the nearest hospital no matter how crowded it is.

“To maintain our prompt ambulance service to the public, we must make progress against emergency department crowding,” said Fire Chief Goodwin. “This Task Force report provides a blueprint for action.”

The Task Force report is available on the health department and fire department website.

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